

WASHINGTON POST
17 October 19842 ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 4-12

Troop Estimates Supported

Pacification Chief Denies Westmoreland 'Cooked the Books'

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NEW YORK, Oct. 16—Former ambassador Robert W. Komer, who ran President Lyndon B. Johnson's "pacification" program in Vietnam 17 years ago, today denied a CBS allegation that Gen. William C. Westmoreland tried to "cook the books" on enemy troop numbers being relayed up the chain of command to the president.

Komer, a witness for Westmoreland in his \$120 million libel action against CBS Inc., said that at a meeting in May 1967, Westmoreland was concerned about a new intelligence estimate showing almost 200,000 additional Vietcong irregulars and asked intelligence officers to take a second look.

When the analysts returned with the same numbers a week later, Westmoreland passed them on to Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to be relayed through unofficial diplomatic "back-channels" to the president, Komer testified.

At issue is whether Westmoreland was libeled by a 1982 CBS documentary, "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," which accused the general of suppressing higher troop strength figures from Johnson as part of an effort by the military command to maintain support for the war.

The program said Johnson relied on Westmoreland's assurances in 1967 that the United States was winning the war and that LBJ, like the public, the news media and Congress, was stunned to learn that the Vietnamese communists could mount the massive Tet offensive in January 1968.

For some in Vietnam in the pre-Tet era, Komer said, the problem in estimating troop strength came when analysts tried to assess "irregular" forces, which included

groups called "self-defense" and "secret self-defense troops." Among them, he said, were women, children and old people as well as standard guerrillas.

Calling the estimates on these enemy forces "vague and rather nebulous," he said methods of counting them were "to say the least Byzantine."

Komer, who ran what Johnson called the "other war" in Vietnam to provide economic security in villages, said the numbers came from Vietnamese documents that were sometimes old or inflated. He said both "our Vietnamese" and the enemy inflated figures.

Komer said he and others wanted to drop these nebulous categories because they "would give a very misleading impression of [increased] enemy strength." But he said CIA analysts strongly fought to keep the self-defense units in the estimates of enemy troops.

At a meeting in Saigon in September 1967, Komer said, CIA and Army officials tried to thrash out their differences. "It was quite a spectacle," Komer said.

He described a confrontation between former CIA special assistant A George Carver and Brig. Gen. Philip Davidson, the Army's intelligence chief in Vietnam, as a "head-to-head impasse." Komer said that when a compromise was reached—taking out the self-defense troops and making them a separate category—Westmoreland accepted the agreement.

Earlier, Johnson's former special assistant on intelligence during this period, Walt W. Rostow, acknowledged that one chart from Westmoreland's intelligence team showed that in 1967 the Army

dropped the "self defense" portion of the "irregular" units.

Rostow, who Monday denied a CBS assertion that Westmoreland brought "mostly good news" to Johnson at a crucial April 1967 meeting, acknowledged under cross examination that there could have been other meetings between the general and the president.

CBS Attorney David Boies showed Rostow notes written by Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton, who later died later in a plane crash. McNaughton recalled that Westmoreland had told Johnson that the enemy had reached a "crossover point" and its troop strength was declining—characterizing the meeting much as the CBS documentary did.

"I have no reason to doubt the accuracy of that [memo]," Rostow said. "I believe it's a different meeting."